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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 000673

SIPDIS

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G/IWI FOR APRIL PALMERLEE

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SUBJECT: THE VIEW OF A POTENTIAL FEMALE CANDIDATE FOR
PARLIAMENT

REF: AMMAN 03620

Classified By: AMBASSADOR EDWARD W. GNEHM. REASONS: 1.5 (B) and (D).

11. (C) SUMMARY. On January 21, PolOff met with Nadia Alool, a long-time human rights contact who is contemplating a bid for a parliamentary seat in the forthcoming elections scheduled for this summer. Alool attended Post's political campaign workshop in January. She "is about 65 percent certain" she will run in the candidate-heavy third district, and plans to campaign on an agenda of educational reform, providing services for the district's constituents and her ability, as a woman, to represent Jordan to "the outside world." Alool discussed the challenges for women in the upcoming elections, and echoed the popular prediction that the Muslim Brotherhood will likely be able to field a large number of "electable" female candidates. Notwithstanding, she is up for the challenge. "Let's face it: Nothing like this comes easy." END SUMMARY.

BACKGROUND

12. (SBU) Nadia Alool is a long-time human rights and public affairs contact. In 1999, she visited the U.S. on Post's "Women and the Enhancement of Democratic Values" program. In early January, she attended a three-day workshop run by Post's PD Section, "How to Run a Political Campaign", designed for female candidates. Alool has been involved with various human rights activities for years and is on the executive committee for the National Society for Enhancement of Democracy. She frequently travels to Europe for human rights conferences (usually focusing on women's issues). In addition, Alool writes regularly for the Arabic daily "al Ra-i". Alool is charismatic, confident and has the family financial backing to successfully campaign for a parliamentary seat here.

"SIXTY-FIVE PERCENT
CERTAIN I WILL RUN"

13. (C) On January 21, PolOff met with Alool at her family's concrete company office. She was thankful for the recent workshop, although she noted that more than a few men also could have benefited from the workshop. Alool said that, generally, she is against the idea of a quota for women, but agrees with the idea of having one for two terms. "For now, the reality for female candidates is that the door is ajar, but not fully open. We need a little boost."

14. (C) Alool is "sixty-five percent certain" she will run, noting that she will have to put up approximately 30,000 JD to run for a seat in Amman's third district, which will be heavily contested with a field likely to include several candidates, both women and men (the district stretches from working-class downtown to wealthy West Amman). Alool's campaign strategy is not complete, and will depend on whether the quota framework reserving seats for women (septel) will allow her to run from the third district or require her to run for an "at-large" seat. She says she will campaign on raising general awareness of the need for better education and providing better government services. She also stressed the need for Jordanians to think critically about matters that are affecting their daily lives. "For example, we need to ask men why they are keeping their women from working while their children are hungry. Why don't they allow their women to work if they are poor? We need to think about this."

15. (C) On Iraq and the West Bank, Alool says it is time to search for peaceful solutions. "We tried war here (in the region), now let's try peace." Interest in the plight of the Iraqi people aside, Alool does not believe Jordanians will take to the street in overwhelming masses or exhibit their frustrations toward U.S. policy with drastic measures. "People just want it to be quick and over with soon," she said.

UNCERTAIN ELECTION RULES, CERTAIN
INTERNATIONAL ATTENTION

16. (C) Alool is waiting to see how the eight seats reserved for women will be allocated, i.e. whether the top female vote-getters will win, or whether there will be some sort of districting. In any case, Alool noted that any woman elected to parliament will have to face the international media. "We'll be speaking, and acting, in front of an international audience, since we'll be making history here." Alool is confident that this will help her, as she speaks several languages and is comfortable in front of international audiences.

FINDING A CONSTITUENCY

17. (C) Despite Alool's confidence in herself, she believes (along with many other contacts) that it will be difficult to enlist women to vote for a female candidate. She said that men often tell their wives for whom they must vote, and a lot of women don't have an independent knowledge of issues or candidates yet. As for men, it will be hard to convince them that a woman can deliver services and otherwise represent the district in a traditionally patriarchal, tribal system. Efficient women can compete with or without a quota, she said, but the problem is finding a constituency or a district where a woman can convince people to vote for her. Note: Alool wasn't sure if Toujan Faisal would be able to run again in light of her conviction (reftel), but was fairly certain that Faisal would try, would indeed have a strong following, and would likely run in the third district. Other contacts share this view. End note.

18. (C) COMMENT. We believe that Alool is representative of a small but growing group of educated and worldly women brave enough to take a chance at a parliamentary campaign who also enjoy familial and financial support. In the face of the well-organized opposition parties here, it will likely be tough going for these women. The popular prediction (also held by Alool) is that the Islamic Action Front, if it participates, will win most of the seats reserved for women with a slew of "electable" female candidates. Still, Alool believes that her candidacy is probably worth a shot. "Let's face it: Nothing like this comes easy," she said. We will report in depth on the quota for women septel.

GNEHM